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AT A GLANCE

The who, what, when and where of the festival

The 23rd edition of the Montreal International Jazz Festival runs Saturday June 27 to Sunday July 7.

Most of the action takes place in the vicinity of Place des Arts bordered by de Maisonneuve Blvd. to the north, St. Catherine St. to the south, Bleury St. to the east and Saint-Urbain St. to the west.

There will be 10 outdoor stages erected in the vicinity with free shows that start every day at noon. For a complete listing of the free shows and our suggestions for what to check out, please see Pages G5, 6 and 7. You'll also find a map of the festival site there.

How to get tickets

Tickets for indoor shows can be purchased over the telephone with a credit card from Admission (514) 790-1245 and at the Spectrum (514) 861-5851. People outside Montreal can call toll free 1-800-361-4595. There is also an Admission Web site, www.admission.com.

Tickets are also available in person from the box office of the host venue. For instance, if a concert takes place at the Salles du Gesù, you can obtain them in person there. Don't assume you will be able to get tickets on the night of a performance. Concerts often sell out well in advance.

Finding information

Once again the jazz festival has set up a telephone information line and a web site to keep fans abreast of last-minute changes and additions to the schedule.

Info-Jazz Bell Line is (514) 871-1881 or 1-888-515-0515 outside of Montreal.

The phones will be manned from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends before the festival starts. For the duration of the festival the line will be answered from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day.

The address of the jazz festival Web site is www.montrealjazzfest.com.

Enjoying the event

Common sense can help you enjoy the free outdoor shows at the jazz festival.

Those new strappy sandals might make your legs look long and lean, but you will be in agony standing on the pavement. Forgo fashion – comfortable shoes, a fanny pack and a quick perusal of the weather report will do wonders for your enjoyment.

And leave the car at home. Parking is scarce during the festival and many streets are blocked. All shows are all within easy walking distance of the Place des Arts métro. Have fun!

On the cover: global jazz diva by illustrator Jo Tyler.

The Gazette
ARTS & LIFE

About this section

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COURTESY OF THE JAZZ FESTIVAL
Orquesta Aragon, which brings its Afro-Cuban sounds to the festival on July 1: "Twenty or 30 years ago, only musicologists had access to this sort of world-music material," says guitarist Marc Ribot. "Now anybody can get it at Tower Records."

The new world of jazz

The borders between genres blur as music goes global

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
Special to The Gazette

Jazz always was a contentious word (and world). Now it's suffering a massive identity crisis. The jazz tradition – a fairly straight line from the 1920s to the '60s – has gone schizo in our era of instant multimedia-driven globalization. Things, to quote the immortal Duke Ellington, ain't what they used to be.

Groove on this, daddy-o: jazz is something called Tabla Beat Science, melding dizzying Indian percussion and African vocalese with electronic "virus manipulations," low-end dub bass and DJ breakbeats concocted by Brooklyn sonic architect Bill Laswell. It's Bombay tabla master Trilok Gurtu playing with a rhythm section from Africa, where historians trace the roots of jazz – though not quite like this. (And jazz apparently is Ravi Shankar's daughter Norah Jones singing country soul.)

Check it out: jazz is Lebanese oud player Rabih Abou-Khalil using fiendishly complicated rhythmic patterns to draw ingenious parallels between cultures; some swear they hear eastern European klezmer in this bazaar at the crossroads of Coltrane and Arabia.

Flip your wigs: jazz is the Vienna Art Orchestra, a fancy name for one hot big band blistering with references to jazz history from a rigorous 20th-century classical music bent, whose 25th anniversary celebration Art and Fun comes with a "re-mix" version. Jazz is fleet French accordionist Richard Galliano and a string quartet paying homage to Argentine Astor Piazzolla's "nuevo tango," which charted the musical (and improvised) course from bordello to ballroom. Jazz is the Orquesta Aragon, which has been bringing its Afro-Cuban blend to concert-goers for more than half a century.

Chill: jazz is the ethereal end-of-the-world club trip-hop of trumpeter Nils Petter Molvaer, guitarist Eivind Aarset's Electronique Noire, and other members of the Norwegian underground music mafia, imagining Miles Davis's spacey horn in a beat blizzard of cool (and plenty of static in the attic).

"Jazz is one of the most difficult words in the world to define," said Gabriele Mirabassi, the clarinetist for Abou-Khalil's ensemble and a leader in exploring global traditions in a deeply personal way.

"For me it's an approach, rather than a specific type of music: jazz means to be a musical thief. For a European musician jazz demonstrates that it's possible to make music in a very free way, mixed in your own personal melting pot – which, incidentally, is what happened at the beginning of the 20th century when jazz was born.

"Of course my point of view is necessarily far from the origins of jazz. The globalization phenomenon has changed the way we see tradition. Unlike musicians of earlier generations who grew up with strong unified local traditions, my own roots were" – in the wired and wireless global village – "in a sense 'destroyed' or leveled by communications technologies. I had to invent, recreate, choose a tradition for myself. This process can be complicated, perhaps uncomfortable for some. On the other hand, it's an opportunity."

"What's quite beautiful about now," said the prolifically polyvalent guitarist Marc Ribot, "is that 20 or 30 years ago only musicologists had access to this sort of world-music material. Now anybody can get it at Tower Records."

Navigating multi-culti territory requires personality to avoid pastiche. Ribot has backed idiosyncratic singers like Tom Waits, Marianne Faithfull, Elvis Costello and, at this festival, Sarah-Jane Morris. He's added "surf guitar" to New York downtown-scene maven John Zorn's chamber ensembles of "radical Jewish music," and subversively affectionate takes on Cuban music (Los Cubanos Postizos,

> **"It's an approach rather than a specific type of music," says clarinetist Gabriele Mirabassi. "Jazz means to be a musical thief."**

"the fake Cubans") and free-jazz pioneer Albert Ayler. He sees his influences as touchstones, not millstones, to creativity.

Because of its history as "America's music," said Ribot, jazz in the U.S. "is not just an aesthetic. There once was a community that followed it, there was a real social thread involved. A long time ago, 1979, when I toured with the late Brother Jack McDuff, we'd go from

COURTESY OF THE JAZZ FESTIVAL
Trilok Gurtu: Bombay tabla master with African rhythm section.

city to city and a big chunk of that black community were jazz fans, a lot of heavy people just knew jazz. That's not as much the case now."

Today's mongrelized music absorbed jazz as just another global vocabulary – not to mention urban hip-hop. So-called "foreign" exotica has perfumed western music for ages, but now it's a genre and industry in itself.

This disturbs Wynton Marsalis, the only man to win Grammys for jazz and classical music (and a Pulitzer to boot), and major domo at the influential Jazz at Lincoln Center. Seeing himself as a custodian for the jazz tradition, he was a primary adviser to Ken Burns's Jazz, the lavish PBS documentary series that raised howls of controversy for skirting the globalized nature of "jazz" over the last 40 years.

After many windy editorials, pro and con, Ken Burns's Jazz became a corporately funded cultural franchise (at one time blitzed 17 of the Top 20 jazz sellers). The result? Major labels are content to repackage "classic jazz" (no recording or touring costs to incur), rarely investing in the present – save female singers and world fusion.

"Categories are perhaps necessary in record stores," said Mirabassi. "But to be intellectually honest, we who work with music shouldn't be tied by them. Wynton Marsalis has a problem with this, but I can understand him. He grew up in America in a period where a new black middle class was taking root, and he sees jazz as the Mozart or Verdi of black Americans. Obviously that makes no sense from my cultural viewpoint."

Mirabassi is from the medieval capital of Perugia – and the pace-setting programming of its annual Umbria Jazz Festival – and started as a classical clarinetist specializing in contemporary music. Ironically, it was from seeing Johnny Dodds on the cover of his parents' Louis Armstrong Hot Five records that he "very much liked the shape of this long black wooden strange horn."

"Marsalis is an incredible player, but I much prefer listening to Miles or Clifford Brown or Lee Morgan or Fats Navarro, players who were not 'taking care' of a tradition but were experimenting with new things at the moment. For me it makes no sense making music without taking risks, because it's from the risks that you can find the deepest emotions. Even if it means you often fall down, that's a rule of the game.

"As an artist I'm looking for someone who's ahead of me taking risks. Even if what I'm doing now can be seen as unpredictable, it's just another aspect of my evolving interest in contemporary music."

This includes a project with two Abou-Khalil bandmates – astounding French tuba player Michel Godard and nifty accordionist Luciano Biondini – called Lo Stortino, "an Italian word that almost doesn't exist, but which we understand as the opposite of straight."

Roots are important, but fossilizing them into categories limits creative options. (That said, 'jazz' is one of the great evocative four-letter words.) If anything, Ribot prefers the term "new music."

"I'm not so sure the Europeans are right when they call me a jazz musician. After all, I've never been invited to play the Village Vanguard. I have enormous affection for certain jazz musicians, like Thelonious Monk and Albert Ayler, but I don't spend too much time worrying about the borders or the definitions.

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